

Message Text

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S E C R E T ROME 8459

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TAGS: PFOR, PINT, VT, PO, SP

SUBJECT: VATICAN PREOCCUPATION FOR IBERIA

REF: ROME 8295

FROM AMBASSADOR LODGE'S OFFICE

1. DURING BRIEF CONVERSATION IN HIS OFFICE MORNING JUNE 12, ARCHBISHOP BENELLI (VATICAN "DEPUTY" SECRETARY OF STATE) EXPRESSED DEEP CONCERN FOR REPETITION IN SPAIN OF PORTUGUESE EVENTS. BENELLI ASSERTED THAT HE WAS POSITIVE THERE EXIST COMMUNIST CELLS AMONG LOWER LEVEL SPANISH OFFICER CORPS AND THAT, ON THE POSSIBILITY OF FUTURE DISSENSION, ONE COULD NOT RELY ON SPANISH SENIOR OFFICERS WHO ARE UNQUESTIONABLY NON-COMMUNIST TO CONTROL THEIR SUBORDINATES. HE NOTED THAT COMMUNISTS COULD UTILIZE SPLIT ALREADY EXISTING BETWEEN MODERATES AND RIGHT WING AT THE SENIOR LEVEL TO WEAKEN CONTROL OF GENERALS AND INSTITUTE COMMUNIST CONTROL.

2. BENELLI LABELLED PORTUGUESE PRIME MINISTER GONSALVES AS UNQUESTIONABLY COMMUNIST AND DESCRIBED AFM AS STRONGLY COMMUNIST INFLUENCED. ONLY HOPE FOR INSTITUTING DEMOCRACY IN PORTUGAL AT THIS JUNCTURE IS SOCIALIST PARTY, HE SAID, BUT THEY UNFORTUNATELY VERY WEAK AND LACKING IN LEADERSHIP. AL-

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THOUGH SOCIALISTS AND SOCIAL DEMOCRATS CARRIED ELECTION, VOTE

PROBABLY REFLECTS ANTI-COMMUNIST FEARS OF ELECTORATE MORE THAN IT DOES GENUINE SOCIALIST SYMPATHIES. HE ALSO POINTED OUT THAT CATHOLICS HAD, BY AND LARGE, SUPPORTED SOCIALISTS BUT MORE BECAUSE THIS WAS ONLY ALTERNATIVE IN THE ABSENCE OF A CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC PARTY. STRONG INFLUENCE OF COMMUNISTS IN PORTUGAL WAS EXEMPLIFIED, BENELLI SAID, BY RECENT AUDACIOUS ORIANA FALLACI INTERVIEW WITH ALVARO CUNHAL (ROME). ONLY A MAN WITH ENORMOUS AMOUNT OF SELF-CONFIDENCE AND A RELIABLE POWER BASE WOULD HAVE MADE SUCH A FORTHRIGHT STATEMENTS, ACCORDING TO BENELLI.

3. THE VATICAN IS SATISFIED WITH CARDINAL RIBEIRO'S LEADERSHIP OF PORTUGUESE CHURCH AND PREFERS NOT TO INTERVENE DIRECTLY IN CHURCH-STATE CONFLICTS AT THIS MOMENT. IN THIS CONTEXT, THE VATICAN HAS REMAINED ALOOF IN THE DEBATE OVER RADIO RINASCENCA. IF PRESENT GOP POLICIES CONTINUED, BENELLI FEELS A CONFRONTATION BETWEEN CHURCH AND STATE IS INEVITABLE, ESPECIALLY OVER AREAS OF EDUCATION AND RELIGIOUS PRESS.

4. BENELLI GAVE HIGH PRAISE TO PRESIDENT FORD'S COURAGE IN VISITING SPAIN AT THIS TIME, A SENTIMENT WHICH HE SAID WAS FELT IN HIGHEST LEVELS IN VATICAN. ALTHOUGH HE COULD UNDERSTAND AMERICA'S GREAT PREOCCUPATION WITH THE MIDDLE EAST, HE THOUGHT IBERIAN PENINSULAR POSSIBLY MERITED GREATER CONCERN SINCE A COMMUNIST ASSUMPTION OF POWER THERE WOULD HAVE FAR-REACHING AND DISASTEROUS IMPLICATIONS FOR EUROPEAN SECURITY AND DEMOCRACY. VOLPE

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